



Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #349*. First Installation, Mercer Union, 1981. Photo: Peter MacCallum. Courtesy Mercer Union Fonds, Art Gallery of Ontario.



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Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #349*. Second installation, Mercer Union, 2010. Pictured: Max Gatta and Eric Glavin. Photo: Jon Sasaki.



Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #349*. Second installation, Mercer Union, 2010. Photo: Sarah Robayo Sheridan.

Front Gallery and Back Gallery

Sol LeWitt: A Mercer Union Legacy Project

Sol LeWitt: A Mercer Union Legacy Project encompasses both the installation of *Wall Drawing #349* in the front gallery and, in the back gallery, a parallel selection of artist books and other ephemera by Sol LeWitt dating from 1968 to 1981.

LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #349* was first executed in 1981 by Sol LeWitt on the invitation of the artists then active at our founding location on Mercer Street. The work is comprised of ten black geometric figures filled in with solid black India ink—right triangle, cross, x, diamond, rectangle, parallelogram, trapezoid, circle, isosceles triangle, square—on four walls painted white, red, yellow, blue. LeWitt, who had been the subject of a major retrospective at the MoMA in New York in 1978, travelled to Toronto in March 1981 with his future wife Carol Androccio and executed the wall drawing with the assistance of Mercer Union artists Peter Blendell, Michael Davey, Jamie Lyons, Robert McNealy, Jaan Poldaa, Judith Schwarz, Renée Van Halm, Cheryl West and Robert Wiens. In 2010, the installation has been overseen by our installation technician Jon Sasaki with the assistance of a current constituency of Mercer Union staff, artists, board members and friends.

We have selected to revisit this historic project by Sol LeWitt as a way of marking time between the founding of our centre in 1979 and our current position. In so doing, we wish to pay tribute to the importance of the artist's legacy within our own innovative history of exhibitions while also tapping into the relevance of conceptual art practices for an emergent generation of artists. The research for the project took the form of both traditional archival research—digging through the Mercer Union Fonds held at the Art Gallery of Ontario—as well as through the collection of oral history from early members of the gallery. These conversations have helped to bring into focus the relevance of our institutional history both locally and within the international arena. The second installation of *Wall Drawing #349* at Mercer Union has supplied a direct point of conversation with an earlier generation of artists and presented the occasion to glean a portrait of the climate of Mercer Union in the early days of our operations.

The effort to mount the drawings in 1981 was a collaborative one facilitated by a personal connection. Michael Davey had previously worked on a wall drawing while living in Scotland, an experience that gave him a strong working knowledge of LeWitt's art. Throughout his lifetime, LeWitt forged many relationships with other artists, exchanging work and eventually amassing a collection of over eight thousand artworks by his predecessors and contemporaries, which are held in the LeWitt Collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum. In the back gallery, we are pleased to show a 1972 series of screenprints which LeWitt traded with Michael

Davey. These prints thus represent a trace of LeWitt's history of exchange with fellow artists. We are also exhibiting a series of personally inscribed cards which LeWitt offered to each of the participants in the 1981 drawing as a token of appreciation for their work. This spirit of generosity was also very much in keeping with Mercer Union's spirit at that time, which was driven in large part by the volunteer efforts of a core group of artists who were active from programming to administration to installation. The culture of exhibitions in Toronto at that time was so animated that a typical exhibition span was two weeks. For the 1981 exhibition by LeWitt, the schedule was extended to run three weeks, still very a very short time line compared to today's typical temporary exhibition length of six weeks or more.

It is an often cited fact that LeWitt was employed at MoMA alongside the artists Robert Ryman, Dan Flavin, and Robert Mangold. If MoMA served as an important social ground for LeWitt to connect with peers and engage in a circle of ideas, so too has Mercer Union served as an important meeting point for artists. Often, the best conversations about art can happen during the install. The climate of collective labour that drives the execution of LeWitt's wall drawings is a critical facet of the work. This element was highlighted in the 1993 Addison Gallery of American Art exhibition, where the galleries were kept open for public viewing of the drawings while in progress. Mercer Union was not officially open to the public while we were installing *Wall Drawing #349*, but we did receive many friendly visitors and were happy to indulge a sneak peek of the work in progress.

LeWitt's *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* is an often quoted text, a primary document of conceptual art. There is one pull quote that always surfaces from it: "In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art." While this quip is often cited to situate the very radical shift in thinking exemplified by LeWitt's stance, it is worth reasserting how very wholeheartedly LeWitt was dedicated to the nuances of the execution of a work. Whether or not it is simply perfunctory, there is great beauty to be found in this functionality. LeWitt's systems and protocols are nothing if not human exercises. The work is strongly tactile and benefits from the synthesis of hand and eye. To participate in the install is to be part of social body, for most of the drawings require the work of more than one installer. While the directives supplied by the artist—whether by blueprint or written instruction—elegantly convey both the idea and the parameters, it is in the execution that many critical supporting decisions are made. At every turn, installers are faced with how best to execute LeWitt's intention. Through the execution, we physically adopt the imperatives of the idea.

It has also been noted that there is room for variation and permutation in LeWitt's wall drawings. Like any other script, the work adapts and changes in the same way that a musical composition fills the architecture differently on each performance and at each new venue. With each iteration, one musical piece, no matter how canonical, may always enjoy a new life. In explaining his relationship as author of these wall drawings, which are executed with the work of many collaborators, LeWitt drew an important analogy with the role of the architect in society. LeWitt, having worked as a draftsman for noted architect I. M. Pei in the mid-1950s, once remarked in an interview: "Working in an architectural office, meeting architects, knowing architects had a big effect. An architect doesn't go off with a shovel and dig his foundation and lay every brick. He's still an artist."

The type and kinds of materials explored by LeWitt were multitudinous and the selection of these materials evolved over time and relation to the market standards of production available. The directives for the drawings become an evolving recipe, with strict parameters, but nonetheless adaptable to a climate of change. One of the greatest inheritances of LeWitt's work is the way in which it is permutable over time. For museums, the question of change over time is often treated as an obstacle and preservation is an integral concern in museum display. LeWitt's adoption of instruction-based drawing trumps the problem of decay and dissolution of the traditional artwork.

LeWitt's rhetoric is prescient of the late 20th century turn towards indexes, inventories and databases. Amidst his long bibliography of artist's books, the 1980 book *Autobiography* contains both LeWitt's characteristic fascination with the organizing principle of the grid applied against the unruly realm of domestic life. Each page collects squared off photographs that inventory of all the articles in his home. This close mapping is an interesting counterpoint to contemporary digital geography and surveillance. *Autobiography* fills in the gap between map and portrait, offering an intimate yet playful record of self that goes into a greater depth than most maps can accommodate.

Sol LeWitt once proclaimed that "Books are the best medium for many artists working today" and it was with that confidence in this art format, that he, along with peers such as Lucy Lippard, founded Printed Matter in New York in 1976. The selection of books and serials presented in the back gallery is primary comprised of loans from the collection of Dr. Paul Marks. As curator of the exhibition, I have made selections from the whole oeuvre in order to highlight the period in LeWitt's production leading up to the 1981 presentation of *Wall Drawing #349* at Mercer Union. In addition to the artist's books, I have also made inclusions such as the Art & Projects bulletins and other pieces of ephemera that lend additional context and supply links between LeWitt's use of the flat surface of the wall and the comparable yet

differing space of the printed page. The books often draw a direct connection with the ideas evident within his larger practice at that time. A few exhibition invitations have also been integrated into the display in order to point to some of the ways by which LeWitt graphically communicated the idea of the work.

LeWitt declared "The words of one artist to another may induce a chain of ideas, if they share the same concept." LeWitt's legacy is one that runs a personal line through the breadth and gamut of Mercer Union's history. In conceiving the exhibition and planning for its realization, I have been fortunate to rely on many encouraging and helpful voices. First and foremost, I wish to thank the 1981 members who provided information about Mercer Union's history and who have additionally supported the project through the loan of ephemera: Peter Blendell, Michael Davey, Robert McNealy, Judith Schwarz, Renée Van Halm and Robert Wiens. It was my great privilege to be amongst the crew who installed the wall drawing for this 2010 presentation and I wish to express my gratitude to the other members of the team: Danica Evering, Max Gatta, Eric Glavin, Jen Hutton, York Lethbridge, Vanessa Maltese and Liana Schmidt, who all worked under the supervision of our master technician Jon Sasaki. Additional installation help to prepare the exhibition was contributed by Xenia Benevolski, Slavica Cepercovic, Lee Henderson, Cameron Lee and Su-Ying Lee, while our design intern Ruby Pajares is to be credited for the announcement graphic. We greatly benefited from the advice and wisdom of Anthony Sansotta who delivered us the revised and hand-drawn plans for the wall drawing. The public talk by Anthony Sansotta is made possible through travel support by Alex Miller. My research has also been aided by the following individuals whom I wish to thank for their time and assistance: Amy Furness at the Art Gallery of Ontario Archives, Steven Leiber, Sofia LeWitt, Peter MacCallum and Michelle Rosenberg at Paula Cooper Gallery. I also wish to thank our in-kind supporters: Absolute Vodka, Heineken, Hearth & Garden at Campbell House, Gladstone Hotel, Jacob's Creek, Sonic Print and Mitch Robertson and Kate Wivell at Superframe. And finally, I am very pleased to acknowledge the presenting donors whose generosity made this project feasible: Bruce Bailey, Dr. Paul Marks, Robert Mitchell, Jay Smith and Partners in Art.

— Sarah Robayo Sheridan, Director of Exhibitions and Publications

Artist Talk: Anthony Sansotta

Saturday 10 July 2010, 3 PM

Please join us on the afternoon of Saturday 10 July at 3 PM to hear Anthony Sansotta speak about his personal engagement with LeWitt's legacy. Sansotta is an expert draftsman who worked with Sol LeWitt for many years and has overseen the installation of hundreds of wall drawings across the globe.

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Sol LeWitt

b. 1928, Hartford, Connecticut; d. 2007, New York

Sol LeWitt was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on September 9, 1928. As a child, he attended art classes at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford. LeWitt completed a B.F.A. at Syracuse University in 1949 and then served in the United States Army in Korea and Japan during the Korean War. In 1953, he moved to New York, where he took classes at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School and did production work for Seventeen magazine. LeWitt subsequently worked in graphic design in the office of architect I. M. Pei in 1955-56. During the first half of the 1960s, LeWitt supported himself by working as a night receptionist at the Museum of Modern Art, where he met future critic Lucy Lippard and fellow artists Dan Flavin, Robert Mangold and Robert Ryman.

In the early 1960s, LeWitt made paintings and reliefs before concentrating, in the mid-1960s, on three-dimensional works based on the cube. For these, he used precise, measured formats, such as grids and modules, and systematically developed variations. His methods were mathematically based, defined by language, or created through random processes. He took up similar approaches in works on paper.

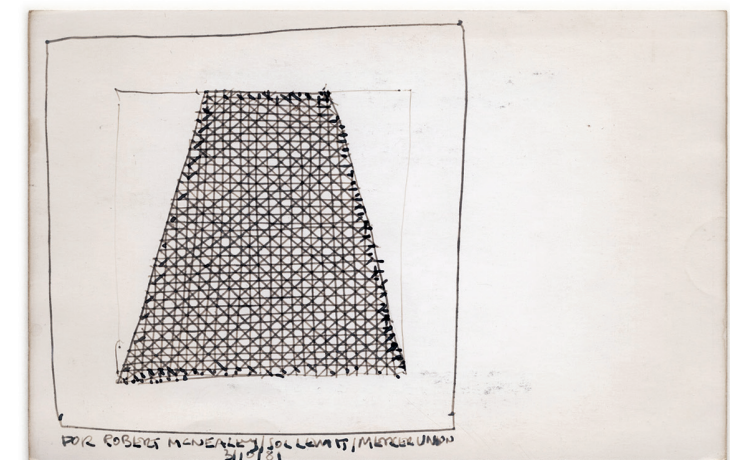
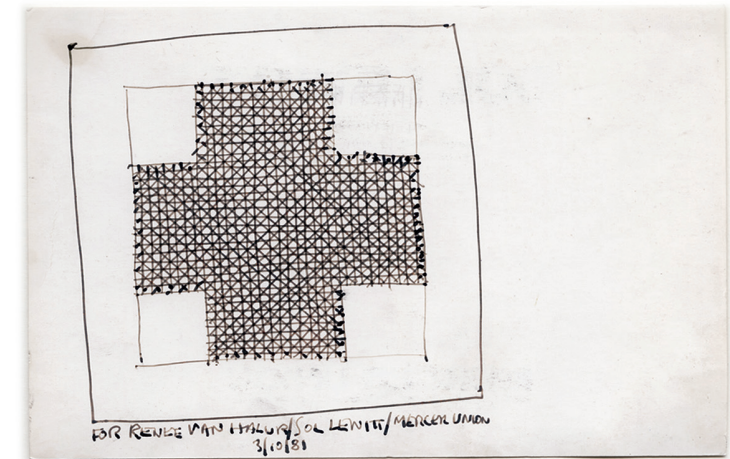
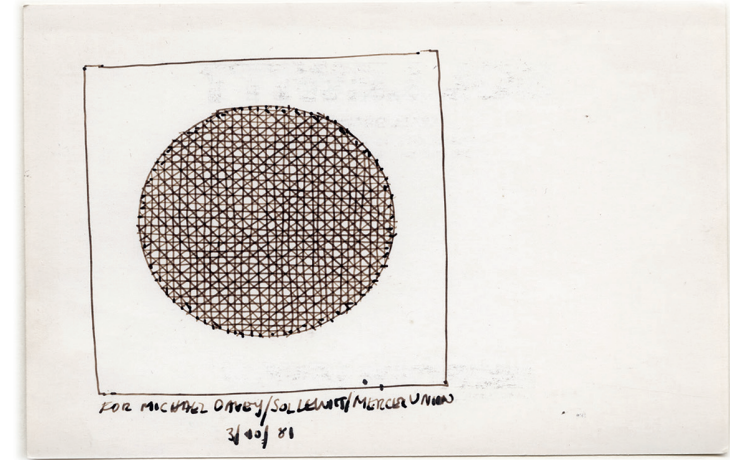
The artist's first solo show took place in 1965, at the John Daniels Gallery in New York. In the second half of the 1960s, LeWitt's art was shown in group exhibitions of what would soon be known as Minimalism; among these were the 1966 exhibition *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum in New York. During this period, he taught at several New York schools, including New York University and the School of Visual Arts.

LeWitt is regarded as a founder of both Minimal and Conceptual art. Inspired by Eadweard Muybridge's sequential photographs of animals and people in motion, LeWitt incorporated seriality in his work to imply the passage of time or narrative. Two important essays by LeWitt, in particular, defined the new movement: "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967) and "Sentences on Conceptual Art" (1969).

He began making wall drawings in 1968. The earliest consisted of pencil lines—in systematized arrangements of verticals, horizontals, and diagonals on a 45-degree angle—drawn directly on the walls. Later wall drawings included circles and arcs and coloured pencil. LeWitt would eventually use teams of assistants to create such works. In sculpture, LeWitt mapped out all possible permutations—he found 122—of a cube with one or more sides missing in *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974). From 1966, LeWitt's interest in seriality led to his production of several artist's books. Among them is *Autobiography* (1980), which documents in photographs everything in his studio on Manhattan's Hester Street, his home for twenty years. In 1976, with Lippard and others, LeWitt founded Printed Matter, an organization established to publish and disseminate artist's books.

In 1980, LeWitt left New York to live in Spoleto, Italy. LeWitt's wall drawings of the 1980s incorporated geometric forms and stars, as well as solid areas of ink-washed colour. His wall drawing for the 1988 Venice Biennale engulfed the Italian Pavilion's interior.

Comprehensive LeWitt retrospectives have been organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1978) and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2000). After returning to the United States in the late 1980s, LeWitt made Chester, Connecticut, his primary residence. In 2000 the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art organized a retrospective which traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In 2008, MASS MoCA launched *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective*, an exhibition of wall drawings completed by the artist from 1969 to 2007, which will be on view to 2033.



Ink drawings on the verso of the 1981 invitation cards issued as gifts by Sol LeWitt to the artists of Mercer Union who participated in the installation.



Sol LeWitt
A Mercer Union Legacy Project

10 July - 28 August 2010
Opening: Saturday 10 July, 2-5 PM